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Globalization And Maritim Crime: The Dynamics Of Human Trafficking In Indonesian Coastal Border Communities

Ivan Filbert Toelihere[1]
[1]Department of Maritime Security, Faculty of National Security, Indonesia Defense University, Bogor, West Java, 16810, Indonesia
Lukman Yudho Prakoso[2]
[2]Department of Maritime Security, Faculty of National Security, Indonesia Defense University, Bogor, West Java, 16810, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: ivantoelihere@kn.idu.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of human trafficking in Indonesia's coastal border communities within the context of globalization, with a specific focus on the fishing industry sector. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative method, this research reveals that globalization has driven the commodification of labor, wherein fishing vessel crew members (Awak Kapal Perikanan/AKP) are treated not as subjects with protected rights, but merely as economic commodities. Structural vulnerabilities in coastal communities such as poverty, low education levels, dependence on degraded natural resources, geographic isolation, and gender inequality serve as primary push factors for exploitation and illegal recruitment. Although Indonesia has established a legal foundation through Law No. 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons, its implementation continues to face significant challenges due to institutional fragmentation, limited capacity of law enforcement apparatus, and the non-ratification of ILO Convention No. 188. This study recommends the harmonization of national regulations with international standards, the strengthening of supervision and protection, the development of secure reporting systems, and the mainstreaming of a human rights-based approach in fisheries management policies to effectively prevent and handle human trafficking in Indonesia's coastal regions.

Keywords: Globalization, Transnational Organized Crime, Human Trafficking, Maritime Security, Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of globalization, which drives cross-border economic connectivity, has brought complex impacts to Indonesia's coastal and border regions. On one hand, the flow of goods, services, and labor strengthens the maritime sector as a backbone of the national economy. However, on the other hand, globalization also opens avenues for the proliferation of transnational crime, including the crime of trafficking in persons (TPPO), particularly within the fishing industry. Indonesia's vast maritime border areas, characterized by minimal surveillance and difficult accessibility, render these regions fertile grounds for human exploitation aboard fishing vessels, both Indonesian and foreign-flagged. In this context, coastal communities, as the primary suppliers of fishing vessel crew (AKP) labor, become the group most vulnerable to exploitative practices.

Human trafficking as a form of contemporary maritime crime has developed into a highly lucrative illegal industry, with estimated global profits reaching USD 150 billion per year. In Indonesia, based on National Police data (2023), there were 3,363 identified human trafficking cases during the 2019-2022 period, with 62% of cases involving maritime routes and 70% of victims originating from coastal communities. The provinces with the highest case rates are Riau Islands, West Kalimantan, East Nusa Tenggara, West Nusa Tenggara, West Java, and East Java—all of which possess significant coastal border territories. These figures do not include unreported cases (dark figures), which are estimated to be much larger.

Furthermore, the alleged human trafficking case experienced by four Indonesian crew members on the motor vessel Sumber Rizqi-A in mid-2024 serves as a tangible reflection of the weak governance and state protection for maritime workers. The victims, who were promised fixed salaries and facilities during employment, instead experienced a contrary reality: lack of wage clarity, wage deductions for cash advances (kasbon), and a detrimental profit-sharing system. The four victims even chose to jump into the sea to escape inhumane working conditions, and their whereabouts remain unknown to this day. This fact indicates the existence of systematic and structured exploitation practices, which are not only materially detrimental but also threaten the right to life and human dignity of the workers.

Destructive Fishing Watch (DFW) Indonesia, together with the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI) and the Pijar Harapan Rakyat Legal Aid Institute (LBH), has reported this case to the Criminal Investigation Agency (Bareskrim) of the National Police as a strong allegation of TPPO involving corporations. Indications of legal violations become stronger with the fulfillment of TPPO elements as stipulated in Article 2 and Article 13 of Law Number 21 of 2007. In this case,

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the alleged abuse of power by recruiting companies and ship owners exploits the vulnerable position of workers to gain profit, making it not merely a labor issue but also a crime against humanity.

This condition demonstrates that the recruitment system for fishing crew in Indonesia remains far from the principles of transparency and accountability. The retention of identity documents without valid employment contracts, as well as the absence of effective supervisory mechanisms, highlights a systemic failure in the protection of maritime workers. Much of the recruitment is conducted through informal channels or unofficial intermediaries that exploit coastal community networks and limited access to information. This irregularity not only impacts the individual security of workers but also strengthens the shadow economy structure that perpetuates practices of exploitation and violence in the marine sector.

This phenomenon is also reflected in the 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report released by the United States Department of State, which places Indonesia in "Tier 2" in the classification of countries based on efforts to combat human trafficking. The rise from the previous Tier 2 Watchlist to Tier 2 indicates progress in policies and TPPO case handling. However, this position also signifies that Indonesia still faces serious challenges in meeting minimum standards for the protection of trafficking victims. The report notes that although there have been improvements in prosecution and protection aspects, there are still 14 priority recommendations that have not been optimally followed up, including the revision of Law No. 21 of 2007 and the improvement of standard procedures for victim identification, particularly for men and boys working in the informal and maritime sectors.

Therefore, this study is crucial for examining the dynamics of human trafficking in the context of maritime crime in the globalization era, particularly in Indonesia's coastal border communities. Through a multidisciplinary approach encompassing legal, social, and security aspects, this research aims to uncover structural vulnerabilities and key actors behind TPPO practices in the fishing industry. Additionally, this study proposes policy measures to strengthen legal protection for fishing crew, improve recruitment and placement systems, and encourage law enforcement that targets not only field perpetrators but also corporate actors who are the masterminds behind this crime.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. This approach was selected to gain a deep understanding of the Dynamics of Human Trafficking in

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Indonesian Coastal Border Communities and the challenges of anti-trafficking law enforcement in Indonesia's maritime and fisheries sector. Data were obtained through a literature review covering legal documents, international organization reports, national policies, and relevant academic studies. Data analysis techniques were conducted qualitatively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing processes as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the analyzed information.

DISCUSSION

Commodification of Labor in the Fishing Industry

Economic globalization has driven production intensification and efficiency in the global fishing industry, yet at the same time, it has opened space for exploitative practices involving maritime labor, particularly vessel crew members (ABK). In this context, ABK from developing countries like Indonesia are no longer viewed as labor subjects, but as economic commodities exchanged within the global fisheries supply chain. This process is termed the commodification of labor, where human value is determined not by dignity and rights, but by the magnitude of contribution to economic profit in the global fishing industry. This aligns with findings from the International Labour Organization (ILO), which notes that approximately 27.6 million people are currently trapped in forced labor, and the fisheries sector is a major contributor to forms of modern slavery, including wage withholding practices, contract falsification, and prolonged isolation on the high seas.

The commodification of labor in the fishing industry begins at the recruitment stage, where employment agencies often employ manipulative methods. This recruitment process involves promises of high-paying jobs, decent work facilities, and social security that do not correspond with the reality in the field. Many ABK recruited from Indonesia's coastal border communities not only experience the confiscation of identity documents and contract forgery but also become ensnared in a system of debt bondage that they are unable to repay. For example, a case study in the Arafura Sea in 2024 noted that 55 Indonesian ABK were promised a holiday allowance (THR) of IDR 2 million, yet not a single one received this right, and even their basic wages were unpaid. Acute economic dependence leaves ABK with no choice but to endure exploitative working conditions, rendering them vulnerable to covert human trafficking practices.

Working conditions experienced by ABK on illegal and foreign-flagged fishing vessels often exceed humane limits. Reports from various civil society organizations indicate that ABK are

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forced to work up to 20 hours per day with minimal rest, lack of nutritious food, and very limited access to clean water. One case on the vessels RZ 03 and RZ 05 in the Arafura Sea showed that ABK had to drink water dripping from air conditioners and were given only one pan of food to share among 31 people. Furthermore, passport retention, prohibition of communication with families, as well as threats and physical violence are common practices, reinforcing the characteristics of modern slavery as defined by the ILO. All of this demonstrates that exploitation of ABK is not merely a labor violation, but a serious violation of human rights.

Exploitation of ABK in the fishing industry cannot be separated from the complex structure of global supply chains. Operations of foreign vessels in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of developing countries like Indonesia often proceed without adequate supervision. Catches from these vessels are then transferred to transport vessels flagged to third countries, disguising the product origin from the exploitative practices that occurred. Fishery products that have undergone this process then enter the international market through distribution channels that are difficult to trace, causing multinational companies and end consumers to be unaware that these products were obtained through forced labor. Findings by Greenpeace and the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI) in 2024 identified 45 foreign vessels, including 33 Chinese-flagged vessels, utilizing Indonesian ABK under forced labor conditions to supply global market demands. This fact indicates a direct link between the global economic structure and systemic vulnerability to rights violations of maritime workers from Indonesia.

Vulnerable Social and Economic Structures of Coastal Communities

Coastal and border communities in Indonesia face various structural challenges that significantly increase their socio-economic vulnerability. Yunanto et al. (2025) identified that endemic poverty in these regions possesses multidimensional characteristics related not only to income limitations but also encompassing aspects of geographic isolation and socio-political marginalization. This condition creates an environment conducive to exploitative practices, including illegal labor recruitment that often targets the most vulnerable populations.

A primary characteristic of the coastal society's social structure contributing to their vulnerability is unequal educational stratification. According to research conducted by Alfian & Mardiana (2024a), the average education level in coastal fishing communities is consistently below the national average, with the majority of the population only completing primary education or not completing it at all. This situation is exacerbated by inadequate educational infrastructure and low accessibility to quality educational institutions. This educational limitation

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directly impacts employment opportunities and limits socio-economic mobility, making residents more susceptible to dubious job offers from illegal labor recruiters.

The livelihood patterns of coastal communities, which rely heavily on extractive activities such as fishing, are also key factors in creating economic vulnerability. As explained by Riantini et al. (2024), high dependence on increasingly degraded natural resources has created chronic income instability among fishermen. This seasonal and uncertain income often drives community members to seek economic alternatives through labor migration, which is then exploited by illegal labor recruitment networks. A World Bank report (2022) confirms that income fluctuations in Indonesian coastal communities can reach 60-75% between seasons, creating conditions of significant economic pressure.

The gender dimension also plays a crucial role in the structure of coastal community vulnerability. Misrina & Wicaksono (2024) explain that gender inequality manifested in the division of labor, access to resources, and household decision-making results in higher vulnerability among coastal women. Women often face double marginalization—both as members of a marginalized community and due to social norms limiting their roles. This makes them attractive targets for recruiters offering employment opportunities as domestic workers or in other service sectors abroad, which often end in exploitative conditions.

Limited accessibility to formal financial services also contributes significantly to the economic vulnerability of coastal communities. According to a study by the Financial Services Authority (OJK) (2021) in Pattipeilohy et al. (2024), less than 30% of coastal residents have access to banking or other formal financial services. This condition encourages dependence on informal loans with high interest rates, which often plunge families into prolonged cycles of debt. In situations of acute financial difficulty, upfront fee offers from illegal labor recruiters become very attractive, despite potentially leading to future exploitation.

Another structural factor contributing to vulnerability is geographic isolation and inadequate infrastructure. According to Alfian & Mardiana (2024b), many coastal communities in Indonesia still face limited access to transportation, communication, and basic public services. This isolation not only hinders local economic development but also creates significant information gaps. Limited access to information regarding legitimate job opportunities, the dangers of human trafficking, and labor rights makes local residents vulnerable to misleading information from illegal labor recruiters. In the context of regional dynamics, coastal poverty patterns in Indonesia are also influenced by development gaps between main islands and border areas. Statistics from the Central Statistics Agency (2023) show that poverty rates in border and outer coastal regions can

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reach double the national average. These socio-economic conditions create strong push factors for migration, both internal and cross-border, which are then exploited by illegal recruitment networks.

The complex interaction between these structural factors—poverty, low education, dependence on natural resources, gender inequality, limited access to financial services, geographic isolation, and regional development gaps—creates a vicious cycle of vulnerability that is difficult to break. As emphasized by Alif Finno Fidzaky et al. (2024), addressing the socio-economic vulnerability of coastal communities requires a holistic approach that focuses not only on economic intervention but also addresses the underlying structural factors. Without comprehensive efforts to address these root causes, coastal communities will continue to be easy targets for illegal labor recruiters and human trafficking networks.

Dynamics of Human Trafficking in Border

Regions Human trafficking in Indonesia's maritime border regions is a complex phenomenon influenced by geographic, economic, and social factors. Regions such as North Kalimantan, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), and Batam-Johor have become vulnerable points due to their proximity to neighboring countries and minimal surveillance.

A. Case Study: North Kalimantan

In Nunukan Regency, North Kalimantan, sea routes are frequently utilized to send migrant workers illegally to Malaysia. The common modus operandi involves the use of fishing vessels and forged documents, with primary perpetrators consisting of local fishermen, brokers, and transnational criminal networks. Nunukan Regency serves as a major transit area for human trafficking on the Kalimantan border. Traffickers often use unofficial sea routes to evade surveillance. They utilize fishing boats or small vessels to transport victims to Malaysia without passing through official checkpoints. Forged documents, such as passports and visas, are often used to disguise victims' identities and facilitate the shipping process.

B. Case Study: East Nusa Tenggara (NTT)

In the Province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), particularly in the waters of Rote Island and Timor Island, human smuggling practices have occurred, making this area a transit route to Australia. Factors such as economic limitations, lack of employment, and minimal surveillance in maritime border areas contribute to community vulnerability to the enticements of illegal recruiters. Rote Island, as Indonesia's southernmost island directly bordering Australia, is often utilized as a departure point for human smuggling. The common modus operandi involves using

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fishing vessels or small boats to transport victims illegally to Australia. Perpetrators often promise high-paying jobs in Australia, such as plantation work paying around IDR 30 million per month, to attract victims. However, in reality, victims often end up in conditions not aligning with those promises.

C. Case Study: Batam

Batam, located in the Riau Islands Province, is known as one of the main human trafficking routes between Indonesia and Malaysia, particularly towards Johor. Its proximity to Johor and Singapore makes Batam a strategic point for human trafficking syndicates. Unofficial small ports, often referred to as "mouse ports" (pelabuhan tikus), facilitate this illegal activity. Human trafficking syndicates in Batam utilize these unofficial small ports to evade authority surveillance. They use small boats or speedboats to transport migrant workers illegally to Malaysia. These migrant workers often lack official documents and are recruited with promises of promising jobs in Malaysia. In January 2022, a series of tragic incidents occurred involving boats carrying illegal migrant workers sinking in waters between Indonesia and Malaysia. Summary of Border Dynamics:

- Sea Routes: Use of fishing vessels or small boats to avoid security patrols.
- False Documents: Creation of fake passports and visas to disguise victim identities.
- Local-Global Networks: Collaboration between local perpetrators and international syndicates to facilitate the shipment of victims abroad.
- Perpetrator Roles: Fishermen provide transport; Brokers recruit and arrange documents; Transnational Criminal Networks manage logistics and final destinations.

D. Regulatory Evaluation and Challenges in Anti-Trafficking Law Enforcement

The legal and regulatory framework to combat the Crime of Trafficking in Persons (TPPO) in Indonesia has undergone significant development, yet it still faces various substantial implementation challenges. Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons is the primary foundation in TPPO handling efforts in Indonesia, comprehensively defining human trafficking to include sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery, and organ transplantation. Although this legal framework is quite progressive in defining the scope and sanctions against perpetrators, an evaluation by Sampurna & Koswara (2024) reveals a significant gap between normative provisions and actual implementation in the field, reflected in the low rate of prosecution and sentences handed down to TPPO perpetrators.

One of the main challenges in anti-TPPO law enforcement in Indonesia is institutional fragmentation which hinders effective inter-agency coordination. Research by Fitrianto et al.

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(2025) indicates that coordination between ministries and relevant agencies remains sporadic and hampered by sectoral egos. The Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of TPPO, formed based on Presidential Regulation Number 69 of 2008, should function as a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism, but in practice faces limited resources and authority to integrate the efforts of various stakeholders. Ananta and Arifin (2022) note that this fragmentation is exacerbated by unclear division of responsibilities between central, provincial, and district/city government levels, resulting in overlapping programs or, conversely, intervention voids in certain regions, especially in coastal and border areas which are TPPO hotspots.

In the context of maritime and fisheries sector worker protection, ILO Convention No. 188 concerning Work in Fishing (Work in Fishing Convention/C-188) serves as a key global instrument establishing comprehensive standards regarding working conditions, working hours, occupational safety and health, and social security protection for fishing workers. Despite its significance, to date, Indonesia has not ratified C-188, creating a substantial regulatory gap in protecting fisheries sector workers from exploitative practices. The absence of this ratification has serious implications for TPPO prevention efforts in Indonesia's fisheries sector, particularly regarding:

1) limited specific legal frameworks for fishery workers,
2) the absence of binding minimum standards for fishery employers, and
3) the inability to use international supervisory mechanisms provided by the convention to ensure national fishing industry compliance.

The implementation of fishery worker protection standards equivalent to C-188 principles in Indonesia is complicated by the characteristics of the fisheries sector, which is dominated by small and medium-scale enterprises with high levels of informality. Research by Dewi & Prakarsa (2023) reveals that approximately 70% of fishermen in Indonesia work in informal employment relationships without clear contracts. This condition creates a gray zone in labor standard enforcement because undocumented employment relationships are difficult for labor inspection authorities to monitor.

Another challenge in anti-TPPO law enforcement and the application of fishery labor standards is the limited capacity and resources of law enforcement apparatus. According to Nurmaya & Prakoso (2022), the ratio of labor inspectors to the number of fishing vessels in Indonesia remains far below minimal standards, with one inspector having to supervise over 200 vessels. Furthermore, research finds that specialized training on TPPO victim identification and technical understanding of fishery worker protection standards among law enforcement officials is still limited, thereby reducing the effectiveness of detection and prosecution of TPPO cases in

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the maritime sector.

The extraterritorial dimension also poses a significant challenge in anti-TPPO law enforcement, especially considering the transnational nature of the fishing industry. Indonesia faces jurisdictional complexities in TPPO cases involving foreign vessels or Indonesian crew trafficked to vessels operating in international waters. Cases such as the Long Xing 629 involving Indonesian crew experiencing exploitation on Chinese-flagged vessels illustrate the difficulty in demanding legal accountability for cross border TPPO perpetrators.

The TPPO victim identification and protection system in Indonesia also possesses fundamental weaknesses. Research by Lindquist and Piper (2018) found that the victim identification system still relies heavily on self-reporting, whereas many TPPO victims especially from coastal communities with low education levels do not recognize themselves as victims or are afraid to report their cases due to threats and intimidation.

In a regional perspective, the effectiveness of Indonesia's anti-TPPO efforts is also influenced by the ASEAN cooperation framework. The ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP), ratified by Indonesia through Law Number 12 of 2017, provides a platform for regional cooperation in prevention, law enforcement, and victim protection. A recent study by the National Development Planning Agency (2023) identified several best practices in anti-TPPO law enforcement implemented in several regions in Indonesia. One is the establishment of One-Stop Integrated Services (PTSA) for TPPO victims in provinces like East Nusa Tenggara and East Java, which integrate legal, health, and social rehabilitation services for victims.

The initial step in strengthening the legal foundation for fishery worker protection is through the comprehensive harmonization of national regulations with C-188 standards. This harmonization includes aligning provisions regarding decent working hours, occupational safety and health (K3) standards, social protection, and transparent and fair sea employment contracts. Institutional synchronization between ministries such as the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP), Ministry of Manpower (Kemnaker), and Ministry of Law and Human Rights (Kemenkumham) is crucial to prevent overlap and legal voids that often become loopholes for labor exploitation.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the close nexus between globalization and the rise of maritime crime, specifically human trafficking in Indonesia's coastal border communities . within the context of

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the global fishing industry, fishing vessel crew members (AKP) from coastal communities have become a highly vulnerable group to exploitation due to labor commodification processes that disregard their basic rights as workers. This situation is exacerbated by structural conditions in coastal communities characterized by poverty, limited education, natural resource degradation, gender inequality, and geographic isolation, all of which create fertile ground for illegal recruitment practices and human trafficking.

Although Indonesia has adopted national regulations such as Law No. 21 of 2007 to combat the crime of trafficking in persons (TPPO), this research indicates a gap between the legal framework and implementation in the field. Institutional fragmentation, weak law enforcement capacity, and the non-ratification of ILO Convention No. 188 constitute major obstacles to the comprehensive protection of AKP. Therefore, this study concludes that protection for vulnerable groups in the fisheries sector requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. Such efforts include harmonizing national regulations with international standards, strengthening cross-sector supervision, building secure and trusted reporting systems, and integrating human rights principles into national fisheries policies. Only through these measures can Indonesia address the challenges of globalization and effectively and sustainably combat human trafficking in coastal regions.

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